

HOT TOPICS

2002
Volume 4, No. 3

CURRENT ISSUES FOR ARMY LEADERS



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Managing Your Pay

TO win the global war on terrorism and transform the Army, we must be able to see first, understand first, act first and finish decisively.

Until quite recent times, however, we had extremely limited capabilities for doing this. For the better part of world history, information processing took place within the brain. Commanders lacked the ability to know what was going on and to communicate with their subordinates. Communications were limited to runner, rider, smoke signal, drum or carrier pigeon. This has traditionally constrained how we operate.

But all that is changing now. Technology is enabling us to be a transformed, network-centric force. To succeed in network-centric warfare, we must conduct combat operations in the three domains of warfare: information, physical *and* knowledge.

Among these, the knowledge domain is where our force has the capability to develop and share high-quality situational awareness. The knowledge domain is also where our force has the capability to develop a shared knowledge of commanders' intent. It is where our force has the capability to self-synchronize its operations.

A key to self-synchronizing our operations is the Army Portal, also known as Army Knowledge Online. Today, our functional business processes around the service are transitioning to the Army Portal. More than eight out of every 10 people in our Army community are using AKO. We are centralizing our network management and consolidating servers around the service.

This issue of **Hot Topics** details the basics of Army Knowledge Management through the Army Portal. A few of AKO's benefits, such as more streamlined personnel and finance transactions, are detailed here. One must remember, however, that our technological transformation is neither an end-state nor a synonym for modernization. It represents a journey – one that fosters a culture of innovation, imagination and initiative to produce dramatically improved future capabilities. Our efforts here are the first steps of that journey.



LTG Peter Cuvillo
Army Chief Information Officer
Deputy Chief of Staff, G-6



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Credits



Managing Army Knowledge

ARMY Knowledge Management is a systematic way to use information technology to improve the way the Army operates.

One key element of this initiative is the intranet portal Army Knowledge Online. AKO leads soldiers, Department of the Army civilians and retirees to the information they need to manage their careers and personal information.

AKM, an integral part of the Army's transformation, is changing how the Army does business. AKM is intended to improve decision dominance by warfighters and leaders — in the battlespace, in our organizations and in our mission processes.

AKM can help you work smarter, not harder. It enables people to quickly find and share information using AKO's powerful tools to access information in official Army resources, and the ability to contact other soldiers and civilians.



Transforming Army Knowledge

THE Army Knowledge Online portal at <https://www.us.army.mil> is a central part of the transformation strategy to transform the Army into a "network-centric, knowledge-based force." AKO is the Army's single point of entry into a robust and scalable knowledge management system accessible from any Internet connection.

The system includes the AKO portal, content-management software, e-mail, instant messaging, chat rooms, knowledge centers, a people locator and white pages, with more features to be added in the future.

In 2001, the secretary and chief of staff of the Army made it a requirement that all soldiers, DA civilians and Non-Appropriated Fund employees obtain AKO accounts. More than one million people now have AKO accounts,

with more than 40,000 of them visiting the site on any given day.

"This is not about a portal. This is about doing your work," said COL Bob Coxe, the Army's chief technology officer.

Coxe has been working with Army and Defense Department organizations to get their programs on the Web and accessible by AKO.

"For the first time everyone in the Army has a central place where they can talk to everyone," said Marc Wilson, the AKO project manager for Appian, one of many contractors supporting AKO.

Wilson called the portal "self-service for soldiers."

The U.S. Total Army Personnel Command, particularly the Enlisted Records and Evaluation Center, is developing two Web-based programs that will be accessible through AKO.

"The more stuff you move to the web, the more you empower the soldier," said COL Howard Olsen, commander of EREC. "We're giving enlisted soldiers the tools to finally manage their careers. That's a powerful thing."

The personnel community is able to easily offer soldiers online access to sensitive career information by taking advantage of AKO's 128-bit encryption.

AKO also has a portal for classified information, AKO-S (SIPRNet), which is for users who are authorized access to sensitive and classified information and have access to SIPRNet. AKO-S mirrors the functionality of the unclassified AKO.

AKO connects the people of the Army, no matter where they are, and helps the Army work smarter, not harder.

AKO—Your Door to the Army



ARMY Knowledge Online opens doors.

By going to <https://www.us.army.mil> and registering for an account, users gain access to information that can help them become successful in their careers.

Once in the site, the homepage offers navigation bars, Army-wide announcements, quick links and frequently used links and news.

The top navigation bar allows the user to move between pages, search the site, personalize the site and access the user guide. The left-side navigation tools access AKO services, “My Services” and “Communities.”

AKO Services provides opening buttons for instant messaging, chat, mail, advanced searches, “White Pages,” “References,” “Benefits” and “Other Services.”

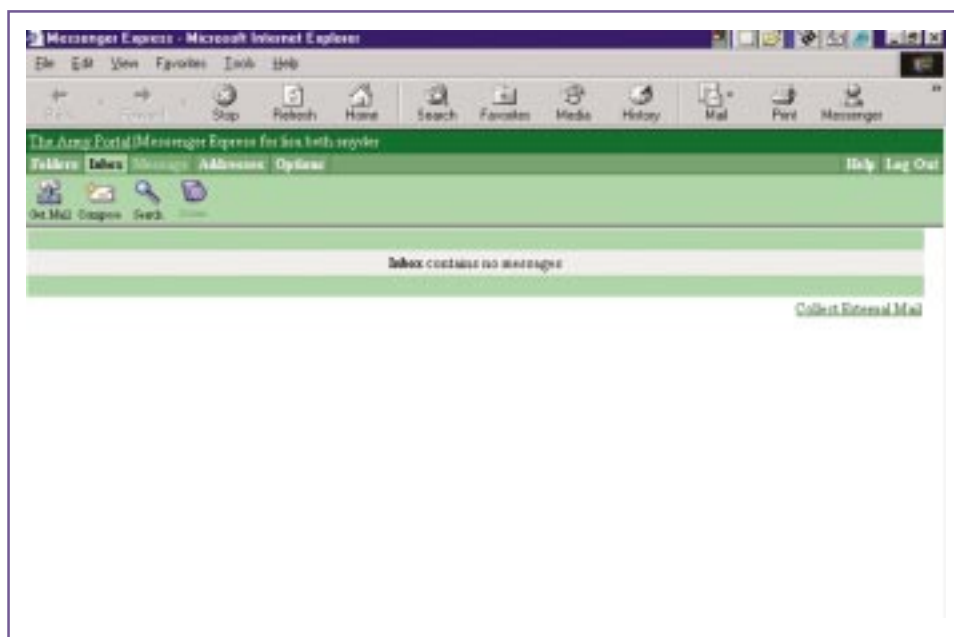
The White Pages serves as AKO’s address book. Type in a name and find a fellow user of the portal. Click on the last name to find the person’s unit or branch, and click on the email address to contact the user electronically.

“My Services” features internal sites to create a channel of personalized links, update personal information and give feedback to the AKO site.

Users can create personal pages with the content, layout and color scheme they like. If users want to change a personal page later, they just click on the “Personalize” button on the upper right hand side of the page or on “My Content” under “My Services” on the left-side navigation bar.

AKO is your portal — make it work for you the way you want it to.





Mail Anytime, Anywhere

AKO Mail offers users free career/lifetime e-mail addresses and access to Web-based e-mail on any computer with a Web browser and Internet access.

Launched by clicking on the left-hand navigation bar under AKO Services, AKO Mail has many of the features users see in other mail programs — single sign-in with the portal, rich text, a spell checker, a personalized address book, folders and a calendar.

Users can choose to use AKO mail as their primary e-mail, or have all their AKO mail forwarded to their local e-mail account. To make changes to the forwarding option, go to the AKO home page

and click on the “Personalize” button, and then on “User Profile.” Fill in the forwarding e-mail address and submit the change. AKO provides e-mail service via a Web interface, POP or IMAP. Users can store a maximum of 50 megabytes of e-mail with attachments, and may send and receive e-mail with attachments totaling up to 20 MB (5 MB if using the Web interface).

The Defense Finance and Accounting Service, Enlisted Records and Evaluation Center, and PERSCOM’s Education Incentives and Counseling Branch are all using AKO Mail to contact soldiers about finance and personnel matters.

DFAS now sends travel-settle-

ment vouchers to soldiers and DA civilians’ AKO addresses.

PERSCOM’s Education Incentives and Counseling Branch is using AKO Mail to contact soldiers if there are problems with their college loan repayments. And EREC uses AKO Mail to contact NCOs and members of their rating chains about problems with NCO Evaluation Reports.

More and more Army organizations will be using AKO e-mail to send important updates and requests for information. Throughout your career — whether active Army, Army National Guard or Army Reserve — AKO Mail will be the one place where you can always be reached.

Getting the Message to Soldiers

BY some accounts, use of instant messaging (IM) is growing faster than use of e-mail and will soon overtake e-mail as the primary method of communication in cyberspace.

“AKO IM” and “AKO Chat” provide Web-based IM services that don’t require the download or installation of new software — they run in the browser, and conversations between AKO users are secure — unlike commercial services which have proven to have holes that allow others to eavesdrop on IM sessions.

IM is used for conversations between two users. If the conversation needs to expand, then one of the two original users can launch the “Conference” function from the IM window.

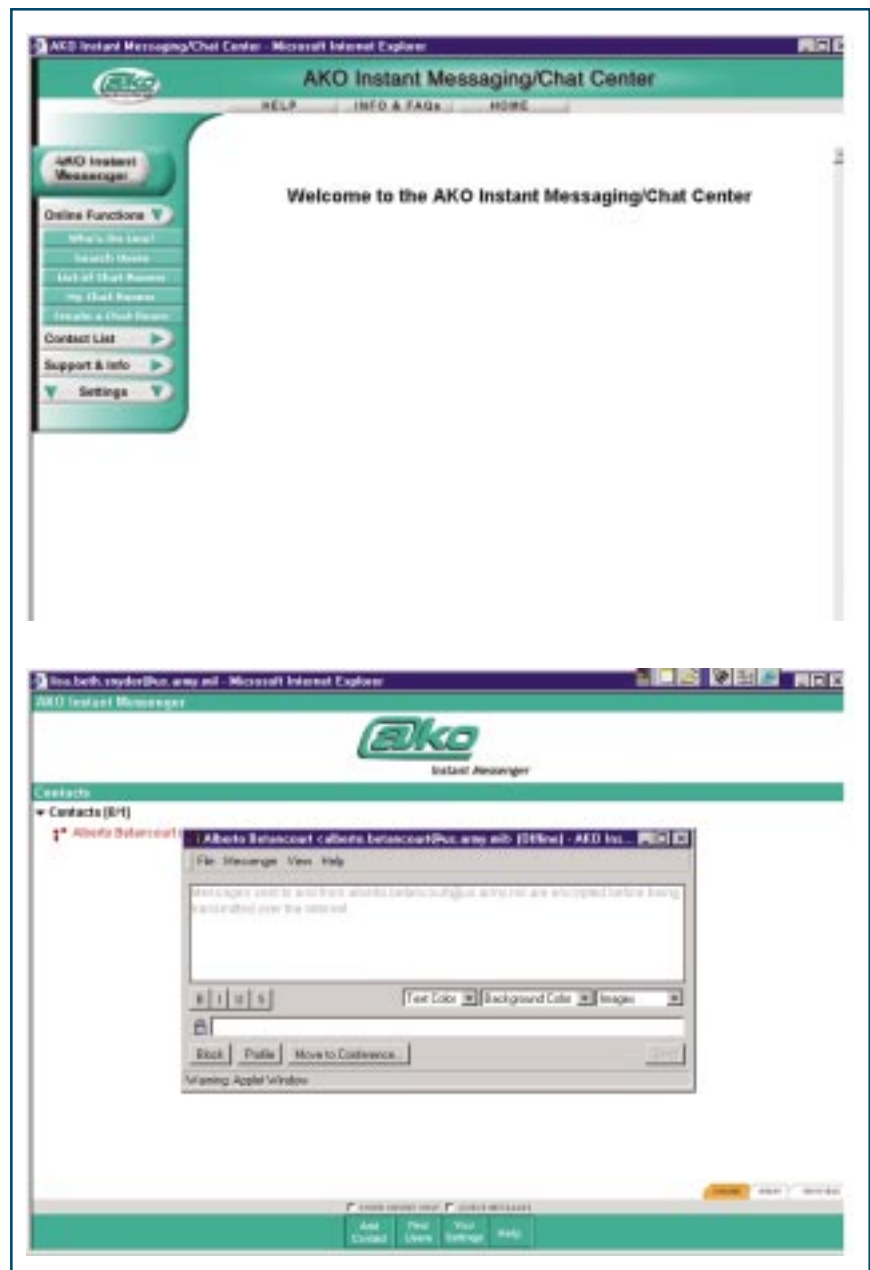
IM also lets users enter and create chat rooms.

To begin using IM, launch the program and click on “Add Contact.” After contacts are listed, the user can begin sending instant messages.

To chat, go to the list of chat rooms, find one that is running and click on it to gain entrance.

Users can also create their own chat rooms. Chat rooms can have restricted access if the original moderator so chooses.

When “AKO Chat” is launched, “AKO IM” will also launch. While IM can function with commercial Internet services, chat only works with other AKO users.



An Army of Collaborators

COMPUTER users often wish for portable hard drives that will allow them to access their documents whenever they want.

AKO's Knowledge Collaboration Center is the Army's shared portable hard drive, which lets users store up to 50 megabytes of data online and, if they choose, share these documents securely through the portal.

The KCC organizes files into knowledge centers. There are two types of knowledge centers — Army Communities, and Personal and Teams. Most users can only create personal and team knowledge centers, but they can request access to Army Communities.

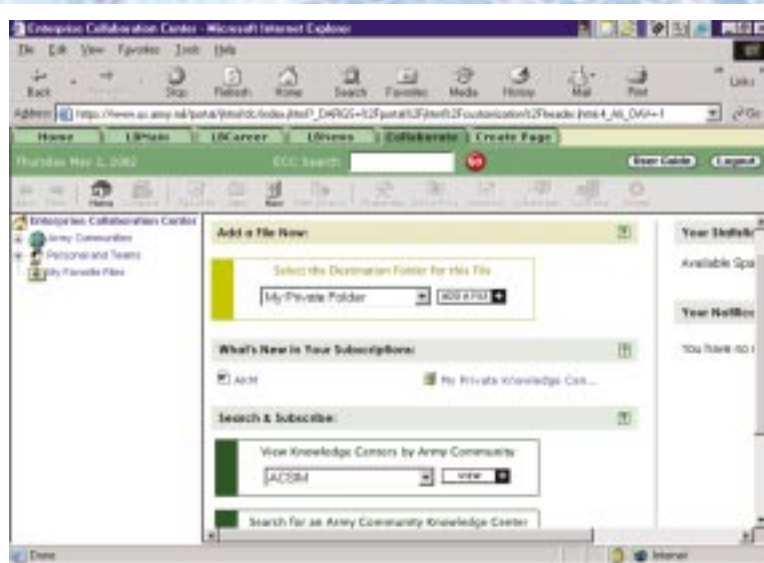
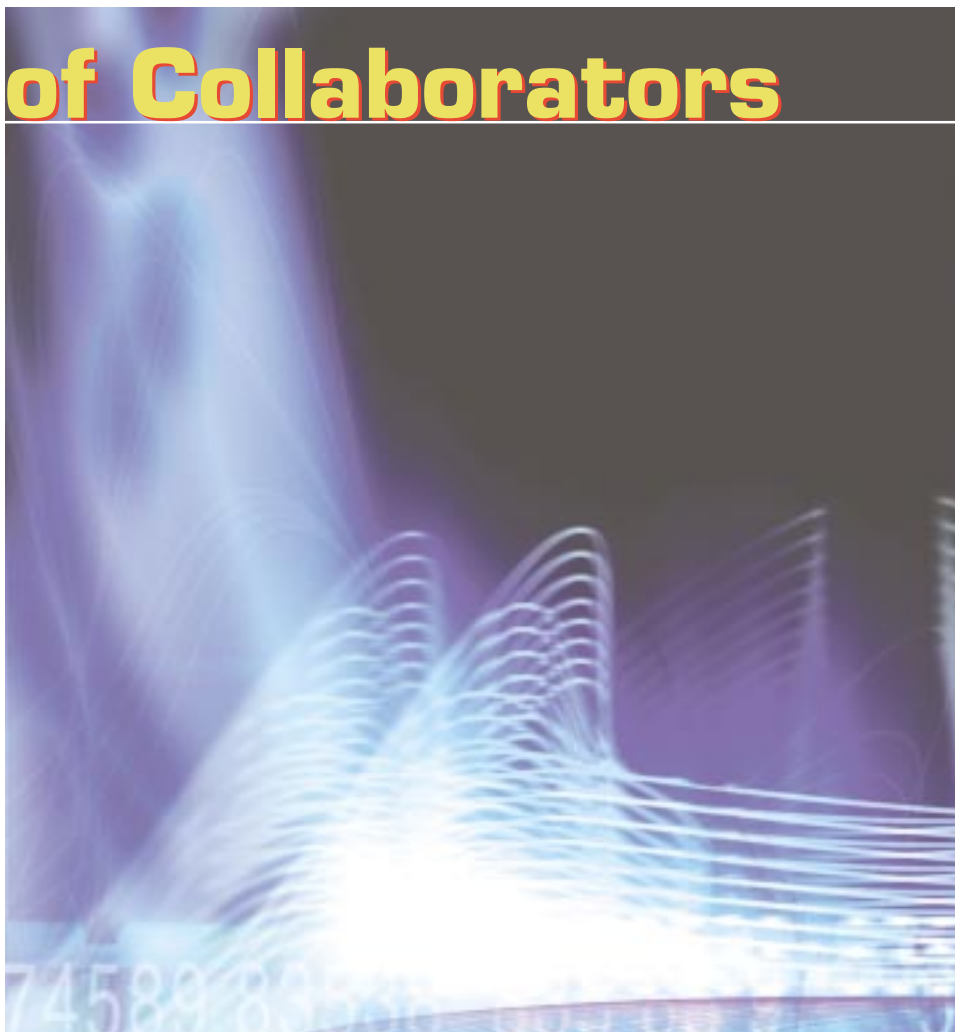
All users have a private knowledge center with a private folder created for them.

To create additional personal or team knowledge centers, click on the filing cabinet “New” icon and fill in the information in “Create Knowledge Center Wizard.”

To add files to a personal knowledge center, click on the “New” icon under the file folder and then on the “Upload” icon to get “Add a File Wizard.”

The New Version button in the navigation bar allows the user to keep track of updates made to documents, while the e-mail link sends the location of the document to someone in the user's contact list.

Army Communities are usually arranged around function or major command. They are managed by an administrator and have documents that the subscribers need to do their jobs.



Connecting

Army

Communities

THE Army is made up of many organizations. On AKO, communities are groupings of major Army organizations that maintain a presence on the AKO home page. These organizations create and maintain community pages, pointers to their home pages, which appear on the left-hand side of the AKO home page under the “Communities,” “Special Staff/FOA,” “Components” or “MACOMS” sections.

Communities are accessed from the left navigation bar and open up into a new window in the portal. Each home page includes information pertaining to the organization, such as announcements, tools, a calendar, news, and document centers and links that are important to the group.



Managing Your Pay

THE Defense Finance and Accounting Service's E/MSS Web site, www.dfas.mil/emss, enables soldiers, civilians and retirees to access pay information from any computer 24 hours a day.

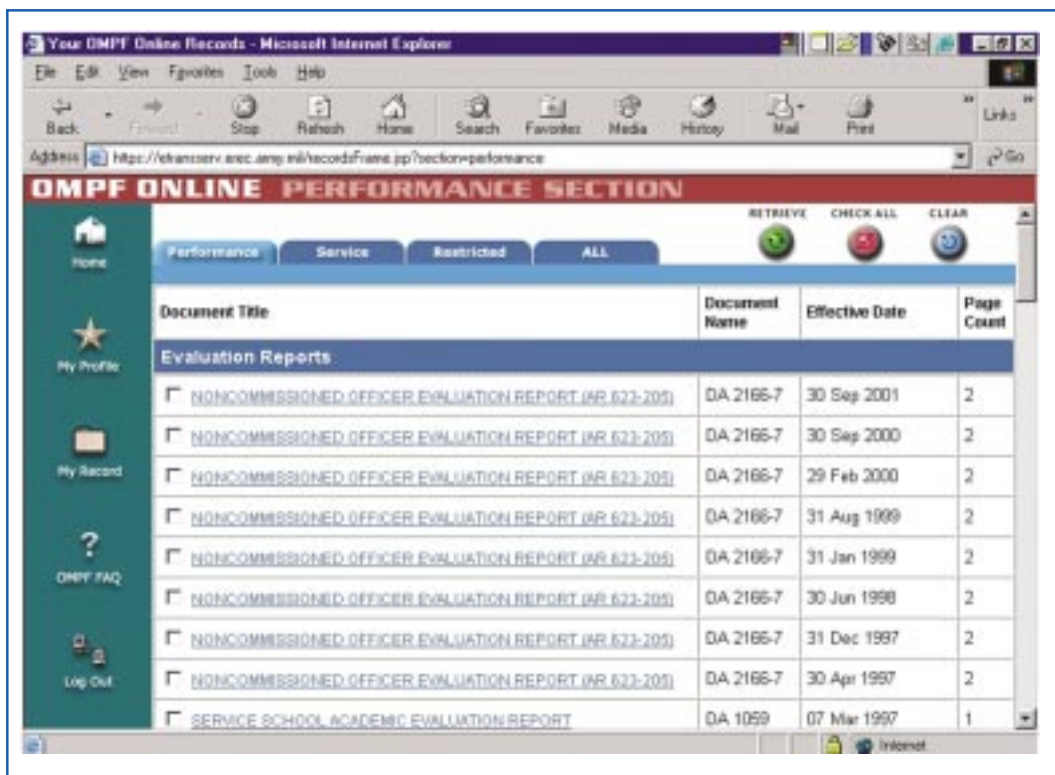
Members can view or print leave-and-earnings statements, update or change electronic fund-transfer addresses, change federal tax withholding information, process Thrift Savings Plan transactions, and view or print travel vouchers. All members should now be able to change state tax withholding information and change correspondence addresses, and should be able to manage allotments and savings bonds by October, and view or print W-2s by January 2003.

Since soldiers and civilians may input their own information, they have better control over information accuracy.

If a change is not effective immediately, the site will provide a "No Later Than" date for the transaction.

When eligible members are first entered into the DFAS database, they receive a letter with a temporary Personal Identification Number. This number must be changed either on the Web or telephone system within 120 days of the date of the letter. If members do not customize their PINs, or if they forget their numbers, they can call the Customer Service Unit Monday through Friday 7 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Eastern time at (800) 390-2348.





OMPF Online

REVIEWING their Official Military Personnel Files was once a yearly ritual for soldiers being considered for promotion by Department of the Army level boards.

Officers visited the U.S. Total Army Personnel Command in Alexandria, Va., and enlisted soldiers went to the Enlisted Records and Evaluation Center in Indianapolis, Ind., to make sure their careers were reflected on the microfiche copy of their OMPFs.

In November 2001, EREC decided to put an end to microfiche and moved the OMPF online.

Now, officers and NCOs can

review and update their records through AKO by going to “Frequently Used Links,” selecting “PERSCOM Online” and clicking on the appropriate link under “PERSCOM Major Activities.”

Records on OMPF Online are divided into three categories — Performance, Service and Restricted. Performance has subdivisions for evaluations, education and training, and commendatory and disciplinary remarks. Service is divided into general and administrative.

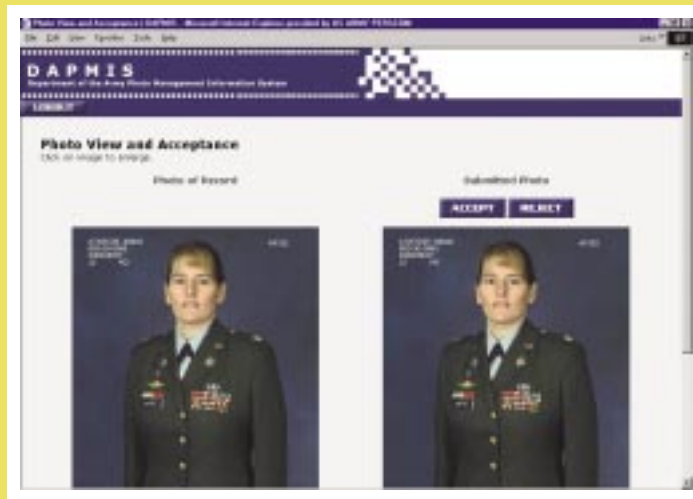
Soldiers can view just the list of documents, or click on a document title or the box next to the title to view the document.

Officers may mail missing documents to their career managers and NCOs may send theirs to EREC. Evaluation reports must be submitted by personnel centers.

NCOs in more than 30 sites (100 by October 2002) at several posts, including Afghanistan and Kosovo, can go to digital sending sites on their posts to have their missing documents scanned and automatically sent to EREC. Those documents will be posted to their OMPFs by the end of the next business day.

Documents mailed to EREC are scanned by digital senders and are posted online the next business day after they are received.

Digital DA Photos



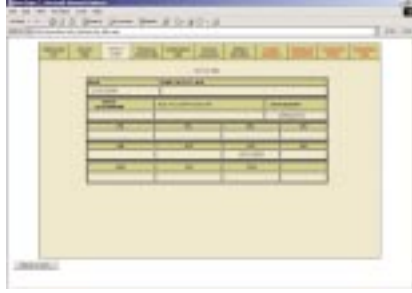
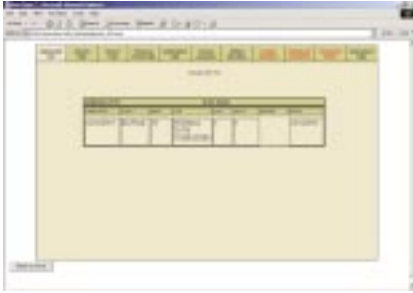
DEPARTMENT of the Army photos represent the soldier at DA-level promotion boards, and soldiers worry about that photo making it into their promotion files.

The DA Photo Management Information System lets Army photo labs send digital DA photos directly to a database where soldiers may review and accept their photos through AKO from any computer.

Soldiers have three business days to accept the photos. If they do not accept their photos in those three days, the photos currently on file in their OMPFs will remain their official photos.

NCOs also will be able to check their photos as part of their online promotion packet at www.erec.army.mil in time for the master sergeant board in February 2003. For officers, the photo will be available as part of their OMPF.

Empowerment is a **vERB**



THE virtual Enlisted Records Brief allows enlisted soldiers to view their ERBs from any computer. Soldiers then know what documents they need to take to their personnel offices to make sure their official records are up-to-date.

The vERB is also linked to the Automated Selection Board System as part of the digital board record that members of a senior NCO selection board see.

For staff sergeants and above whose records go before a senior NCO selection board, they will be able to digitally authenticate their Personal Qualification Record (the portions of the ERB that will be seen by a selection board) from anywhere.

The digital photo and online OMPF are also part of the electronic board record. Except for the synopsis of the soldier's record, the Personal Data Sheet, and the board member voting sheet, the soldier will see the same information board members see.

There are plans to put the Officer Record Brief online and to use an automated board selection system, though no schedule has been announced.

However, the Officer Management Division is using AKO for Career Field Designation, and command and senior service college preference statement submissions via the Web.

ASK for Your Assignment

ENLISTED soldiers can ask for the assignments they want using the Assignment Satisfaction Key (ASK) at www.perscom.army.mil.

Accessed via AKO's "Frequently Used Links," the online program lets enlisted soldiers input their assignment preferences and special-duty interests directly into the Total Army Personnel Database, which is used by assignment managers and professional-development NCOs to make assignments.

ASK also requests an address, home and work telephone numbers and e-mail address so the managers at the U.S. Total Army Personnel Command can contact soldiers directly about their careers. In addition to assignment preferences, soldiers can also see if they are on assignment instructions and they can view their highest military-education level data on file.

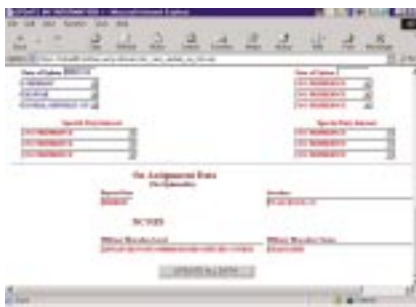
The assignment data is divided into two columns: "Assignment Preference" and "Assignment Volunteer."

"Assignment Preference" selections indicate where the soldier would like to go when eligible for reassignment. Soldiers must pick three continental United States (CONUS) locations and three outside continental United States (OCONUS) locations. Soldiers may also indicate whether they have a desire to be considered for drill sergeant, recruiting or airborne duty.

"Assignment Volunteer" selections indicate that if the Army has a valid requirement, the soldier wants to move immediately. Special-duty interests can also be identified in the volunteer section. In addition to drill sergeant, recruiting and airborne duty, soldiers can volunteer for the U.S.

Army Cadet Command. Making selections in the assignment volunteer column is optional.

Assignment preferences are no longer "dream sheets" as they used to be called. In the old days, soldiers could choose from 230 CONUS locations and 280 OCONUS locations. In reality, soldiers had almost no chance of being assigned to many of these locations. The newly designed assignment preferences require



soldiers to select two CONUS locations from a Divisional Installations Listing and one CONUS location from a more expanded listing. Soldiers will be able to select three OCONUS locations from a listing of four (Germany, Korea, Alaska and Hawaii).

By providing soldiers with realistic location options, Army readiness requirements are matched with soldiers' assignment preferences. By submitting assignment preferences, soldiers are contributing to the overall decision process.

The information provided in ASK is integrated into the Soldier Assignment Module (SAM) program. The SAM gives PERSCOM assignment managers and professional-development NCOs the capability to match the individual soldier's preferences against Army readiness requirements worldwide. The SAM filters

soldiers that are ineligible for reassignment based on established criteria, places qualified soldiers in order of merit, and identifies ASK volunteers who are nominated for assignment over nonvolunteers.

The locations in which soldiers can choose are listed below:

Divisional Installations

Fort Bragg, N.C.
Fort Campbell, Ky.
Fort Carson, Colo.
Fort Drum, N.Y.
Fort Hood, Texas
Fort Lewis, Wash.
Fort Polk, La.
Fort Riley, Kan.
Fort Stewart, Ga.

Divisional and Other CONUS Installations

Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md.
Fort Belvoir, Va.
Fort Benning, Ga.
Fort Bliss, Texas
Fort Bragg, N.C.
Fort Campbell, Ky.
Fort Carson, Colo.
Fort Drum, N.Y.
Fort Eustis, Va.
Fort Gordon, Ga.
Fort Hood, Texas
Fort Huachuca, Ariz.
Fort Irwin, Calif.
Fort Jackson, S.C.
Fort Knox, Ky.
Fort Leavenworth, Kan.
Fort Lee, Va.
Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.
Fort Lewis, Wash.
Fort Meade, Md.
Fort McPherson, Ga.
Fort Monroe, Va.
Fort Polk, La.
Redstone Arsenal, Ala.
Fort Riley, Kan.
Fort Rucker, Ala.
Fort Sam Houston, Texas
Fort Sill, Okla.
Fort Stewart, Ga.

RESOURCES

ARMY Knowledge Online — Enter the AKO Portal at <https://www.us.army.mil> to access the Army's knowledge management tool. For online help, click on the "Help" bar to talk to the Help Desk over the Internet (speakers and microphone needed) or call (877) AKO-USER [(877) 256-8737] or (DSN) 564-3791.

Defense Finance and Accounting Service — Access the Employee/Member Self Service at www.dfas.mil/emss. To get a temporary personal identification number, fax or mail your name, SSN, a copy of your government photo ID, your daytime phone number and your signature to (216) 522-5800 or to:

DFAS-Cleveland/PMCAA
Attention E/MSS
1240 East 9th Street
Cleveland, OH 44199

For more information go to the Web site or call the E/MSS Interactive Voice Response System, toll-free, at (877) 363-3677, or commercial (478) 757-3119.

For problems using E/MSS, or with your E/MSS PIN, contact the DFAS Centralized Customer Support Unit toll-free at (800) 390-2348, or commercial at (216) 522-5122, or (DSN) 580-5122. This support line is available Monday through Friday, 7:00 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Eastern Standard Time.

U.S. Total Army Personnel Command — The Enlisted Records and Evaluation Center has links on its home page, www.erec.army.mil, to OMPF Online, vERB and ASK. For information about NCOERS and DA photos for NCOs, click on "IWRs" (Interactive Web Response System) on the EREC home page. Enlisted soldiers can also get information about assignment notices on PERSCOM's Interactive Voice Response System at (800) FYI-EPMD (394-3763), commercial (703) 325-3763 or (DSN) 221-3763. Officers should contact their branch assignment managers at PERSCOM for information about assignments, OERs or DA photos.



The AKO Vision

To transform the institutional Army into an information-age, networked organization that leverages its intellectual capital to better organize, train, equip and maintain a strategic land combat force.



Army Knowledge Management

AKO accounts have been mandatory for all soldiers, DA civilians and Non-Appropriated Fund employees since October 2001. Retired soldiers and U.S. Military Academy cadets are also eligible for full AKO accounts.

The AKO portal is a place where you can:

- ❶ Access numerous sources of information and services, including an Army “white page” address book and Armywide applications to help you perform your duties.
- ❷ Locate others who share your interests.
- ❸ Share information by adding your ideas, suggestions and lessons learned to the cumulative Army knowledge base.
- ❹ Use collaborative tools such as chat rooms and the Knowledge Collaboration Center (KCC), a document-storage and sharing application, to work with others.
- ❺ AKO, E/MSS and PERSCOM Online offer secure Web-enabled applications for you to conduct Army business; handle pay, legal and medical appointments; and perform personnel actions.
- ❻ Anyone eligible for a full AKO account can sponsor people in the following categories for guest accounts: family members of full AKO members, contractors, Army volunteers, cadets (collegiate level), retired DA civilians, members of the other U.S. services, Air National Guard members and foreign officers attached to the Army.

BOTTOM LINE

AKO gives you the tools to manage and control your career.